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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Health in the Balance Town Hall

What's happening to our health? The United States spends more than twice the average of other industrialized countries on health care yet has some of the worst health outcomes. U.S. businesses lose more than \$1 trillion a year in productivity due to chronic illness.

Furthermore, research has revealed a gradient to health. At each step down the socio-economic ladder – from the rich to the middle class to the poor – people tend to be sicker and die sooner. Poor Americans die on average five and half years sooner than the middle class. But middle class Americans die almost three years sooner than the rich.

Racial and ethnic health inequities don't just reflect income. More African American, Native American, Latino and Pacific Islanders are in poor or fair health than whites at practically every income level.

UNNATURAL CAUSES: Is Inequality Making Us Sick, a four-hour series that was shown for the first time on television by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in spring 2008, sounded the alarm about our huge and upsetting socio-economic and racial disparities in health.

The national broadcast generated significant interest and engagement. In an effort to continue that interest, the Coconino County Health Department partnered with the United Way of Northern Arizona, Coconino County Supervisor Liz Archuleta, City of Flagstaff, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona, North Country HealthCare and Arizona Public Service to bring community leaders together to discuss this topic.

The *Health in the Balance* Town Hall Meeting was held on Thursday, November 13. The meeting brought together decision makers and community leaders to discuss the important issues related to health inequities in our community and introduced the importance of equity and social justice - including jobs, labor policy, housing, community development, affirmative action, education - into discussions of health.

"We are grateful for Coconino County's leadership and look forward to working with the County to address these issues in the future," said Kerry Blume, President of United Way of Northern Arizona.

By participating in the Town Hall meeting, contributors recognized that:

- Health and longevity are correlated with socio-economic status
- People of color face an additional health burden
- Our health and well-being are tied to policies that promote economic and social justice

Portions of the series *UNNATURAL CAUSES* were shown at the Town Hall meeting. These highlights revealed startling new findings that suggest there is much more to our health than bad habits, health care or unlucky genes. While we spend billions on drugs, dietary supplements and new medical technologies, the series circles in on a slow killer in plain view: the social circumstances in which we are born, live and work can actually get under our skin and affect our risk for disease as surely as germs and viruses.

“The PBS series focused on a number of alarming issues that exist throughout the United States and right here in our community. The *Health in the Balance* Town Hall meeting marked the beginning of an ongoing initiative to recognize and address health inequities. We appreciate the work of our partners in this endeavor and look forward to continuing this discussion,” Coconino County Health Department Director Barbara Worgess said.

The *Health in the Balance* Town Hall closing discussions centered on the appropriate next steps for our community to address these issues. Future meeting and collaborative efforts are planned and will be coordinated by the United Way of Northern Arizona and the Coconino County Health Department.

For more information, please contact the Coconino County Health Department at 928-679-7272 or visit www.coconino.az.gov/health.

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